

(12) UK Patent Application (19) GB (11) 2 282 690 (13) A

(43) Date of A Publication 12.04.1995

(21) Application No 9320479.0

(22) Date of Filing 05.10.1993

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(51) INT CL⁶
G07F 17/32 9/00

(52) UK CL (Edition N)
G4V VBF V118 V119

(56) Documents Cited
EP 0360613 A2

(58) Field of Search
UK CL (Edition M) **G4V VBF**
INT CL⁵ **G07F 5/20 5/22 9/00 9/08 17/32 17/34 17/36
17/38**
ONLINE DATABASE:WPI

(54) Credit -operated machines

(57) An entertainment machine such as a fruit machine is operated to play games after generation of game credit by insertion of coins into a coin mechanism. The player can insert a loyalty card into a read/write slot (10) on the machine so that a credit value related to usage of the machine is written onto a magnetic stripe of the card. Subsequently the card can be re-presented to the read/write slot (10) to obtain an indication on a display (14) of accumulated credit value with a view to building up enough value to qualify for an award. This encourages player loyalty to a particular machine or group of machines.

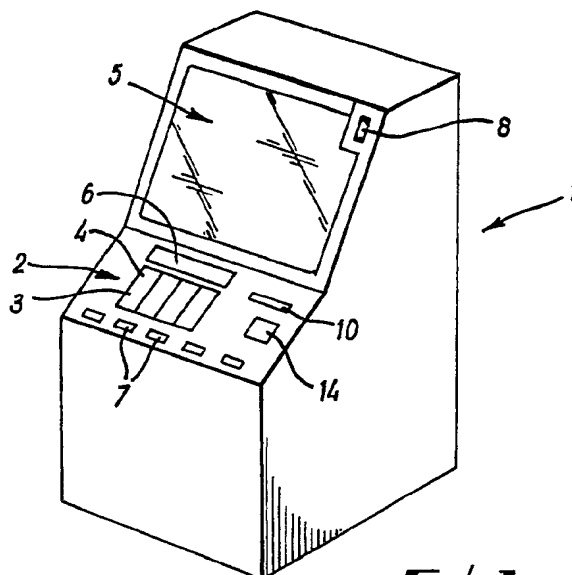


Fig. 1

At least one drawing originally filed was informal and the print reproduced here is taken from a later filed formal copy.

The claims were filed later than the filing date within the period prescribed by Rule 25(1) of the Patents Rules 1990.

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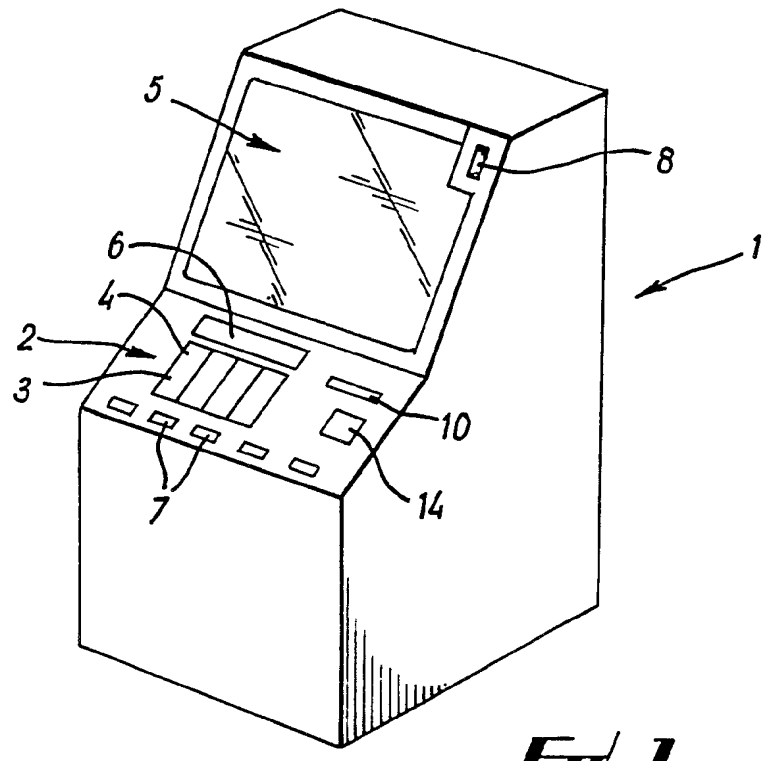


FIG. 1

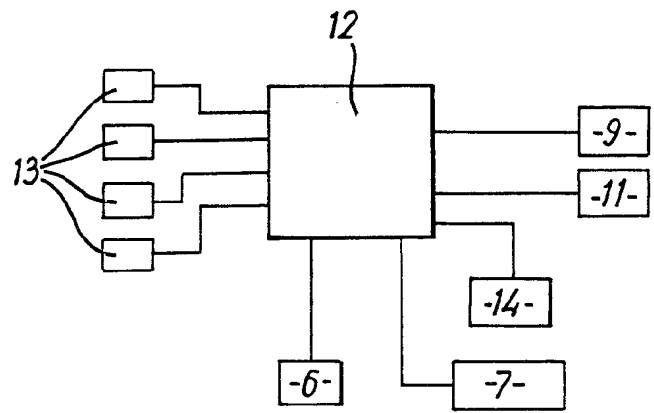


FIG. 2

- 1 -

CREDIT-OPERATED MACHINES

This invention relates to credit-operated entertainment machines, that is, machines which can be operated to play a game after actuation by insertion of coins, tokens, credit
5 cards or other means of supplying credit or monetary value.

The same, or similar credit-operated entertainment machines are commonly provided at many different sites, such as public houses or clubs, which are visited by regular and also occasional customers.

10 In the interests of optimising revenue it is desirable to promote loyalty to a machine which is of a particular kind or is located at a particular site so that a customer will be encouraged to reuse preferentially that kind of machine or to revisit preferentially that site.

15 It is known to encourage customer revisits to a retail site by providing the customer with a 'loyalty' card, that is, a magnetic stripe card, of the credit card kind, on which points are recorded and accumulated when purchases are made at the site. This is achieved by presentation of the
20 card to a recording device associated with the operation of a till.

An object of the present invention is to provide a credit-operated entertainment machine incorporating means for promoting customer loyalty.

25 According to the invention therefore there is provided a credit-operated entertainment machine characterised by the

provision of a data transfer device for transferring data to a personal data-recording device representing credit related to player usage of the machine, such that successive usage results in transferred data being accumulated to the account
5 of the respective player.

With this arrangement whenever a player uses the machine he receives credit for this and the credit accumulates with successive usage of the machine thereby encouraging the player to revisit and reuse the same
10 machine, or repeatedly to visit and use compatible machines (i.e. machines having data transfer devices compatible with the same player's recording device). As desired therefore, the player can be encouraged to revisit the same site or to seek out machines at different sites having data transfer
15 devices compatible with his recording device.

Where players are encouraged to revisit the same site this can increase site revenue for the machine (or machines) located there, or for other customer services, such as drink sales in the case of a public house.

20 Where players are encouraged to seek out compatible machines, this can increase revenue of such machines compared with other non-compatible machines.

The accumulated credit may be exchangeable for gifts or monetary value or other consideration in any suitable
25 automatic or personnel-administered manner.

The accumulation of personal credit may be related to

the amount of credit or monetary value supplied by the player for machine operation purposes, and/or to the number of games played. Preferably the accumulation of personal credit is wholly independent of the outcome of games played
5 and is related solely to credit or monetary value supplied whereby the data transfer device may be connected to a coin mechanism or similar device of the machine to be operated directly in correspondence therewith.

The personal data recording device is preferably a
10 portable device such as a magnetic stripe card of the credit card kind or any other suitable device to which information can be "written" for storage and subsequent retrieval by electrical contact or non-contact proximity transfer by magnetic or other means.

15 The data transfer device may comprise any suitable device appropriate to the format of the data recording device.

Reading of transferred accumulated data for the purpose of evaluating such data may be achieved with a suitable
20 reader on the respective machine of separate thereto.

The data recording device may be of the conventional loyalty card kind whereby associated equipment such as the data transfer device and the reader may be of the kind conventionally used with loyalty cards.

25 The credit-operated entertainment machine may be of any suitable kind and this may comprise a gaming machine, or an

amusement-with-prizes machines or a skill-with-prizes machine or a non-prizes amusement machine. By way of example the machine may be a video game machine, a quiz machine, a random or pseudo random selection machine such as
5 a 'fruit' machine or 'poker' machine or the like.

The invention will now be described further by way of example only and with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:-

Fig. 1 is a diagrammatic perspective view of one form
10 of a machine according to the invention; and

Fig. 2 is a schematic block circuit diagram of the machine.

As shown in the drawings, a fruit machine comprises a floor-standing housing 1 having a front display panel 2 with
15 a lower window 3 through which can be seen the peripheries of four side by side rotatable reels 4, and an upper display area 5. There is also a digital display device 6.

Beneath the reels 4 there is a range of press buttons 7. At one side at the top of the front panel 2 there is the
20 usual coin 8 leading to a coin mechanism 9 within the machine, and beneath the area 5 there is a further slot 10 leading to a read/write system 11 for reading/writing from/to a magnetic-stripe storage card of the credit card kind.

25 Within the housing 1 there is a control system comprising a main microprocessor control unit 12 connected

via interfaces to the coin mechanism 9 and the read/write system 11, stepper motors 13 for the reels 4, the press buttons 7 and the display device 6.

To operate the machine a player inserts one or more
5 coins through the slot 8 and the amount of credit available for playing games is shown on a digital display device 14.

The player can now insert a personal 'loyalty' card of the magnetic stripe credit card kind into the slot 10 so that the read/write system 11 writes onto the card a number
10 of units of credit related to the number of games credited on the display device 14. The number of units transferred is accumulated with any units already stored on the card to give a stored total.

The machine can now be used in the usual way by
15 pressing a start button 7 to cause the reels 4 to rotate for respective different random periods. When they come to rest a selected combination of symbols is displayed on a win line. If the combination is a winning combination an indication is given, e.g. on the display device 6. Winnings
20 may be transferred to game credits displayed on the device 14 but cannot be used for storage on the loyalty card. The read/write system 11 is only operable to write to the card credits corresponding to coins inserted into the coin mechanism 9.

25 At any time after playing of a game the card can be re-presented to the slot 9 and the machine can be operated

to display on the device 6 the accumulated credit total stored on the card.

Alternatively, the card can be presented to a separate card reader (not shown) e.g. behind a counter or bar where a responsible person can read the value on the card, cancel this value and make a corresponding payment, or prize award, to the player.

The arrangement may be such that the card is coded so that it can only be used with a particular machine, or 10 machines, at the same site. The person is issued with the coded card and every time he visits the site and plays the (or one) of the machines at that site he receives a credit which is accumulated to his account and which he can eventually use, when the total is high enough, to obtain a 15 gift or monetary value. The player is thereby encouraged to revisit the same site. In accordance with this the (or each) machine at the site will be pre-set to read/write only a compatible card i.e. a card having a code pertaining to that site.

20 It is of course to be understood that the invention is not intended to be restricted to the details of the above embodiment which are described by way of example only.

Thus, for example, instead of encouraging loyalty to a particular site, loyalty may be encouraged to a particular 25 group of sites or a particular kind of machine, whereby the card and machines will be appropriately coded so that the

same card is compatible with machines at different sites.

As described herein, the data transfer device 11 for storing credit on the personal magnetic stripe card is controlled by the control system 12 of the machine and provision is made for displaying the accumulated total on the machine display 6. It is however possible to isolate the data transfer function from the control function of the machine whereby the data transfer device is connected directly to the coin mechanism 9 but otherwise is wholly isolated from the operation of the machine. In this case, the data transfer device may comprise a conventional loyalty card device which simply writes to the loyalty card in correspondence with the value of coins inserted into the coin mechanism 9. The transfer device may also incorporate a read and display functions although if desired this function can be performed by a separate system unrelated to and remote from the machine e.g. near to a till or counter at the site.

CLAIMS

1. A credit-operated entertainment machine characterised by the provision of a data transfer device for transferring data to a personal data-recording device representing credit
5 related to player usage of the machine, such that successive usage results in transferred data being accumulated to the account of the respective player.
2. A credit-operated machine according to claim 1 wherein the accumulation of personal credit is related to the amount
10 of credit or monetary value supplied by the player for machine operation purposes.
3. A credit-operated machine according to Claim 1 or 2 wherein the accumulation of personal credit is related to the number of games played.
- 15 4. A credit-operated machine according to claim 1 wherein the accumulation of personal credit is wholly independent of the outcome of games played and is related solely to credit or monetary value supplied.
- 20 5. A credit-operated machine according to claim 4 wherein the data transfer device is connected to a coin mechanism of the machine so as to be operated directly in correspondence therewith.
6. A credit-operated machine according to any one of claims 1 to 5 wherein the personal data recording device is
25 a magnetic stripe card.
7. A credit-operated machine according to any one of

claims 1 to 6 which is a fruit machine.

8. A credit-operated machine according to any one of claims 1 to 7 further including a reader for reading transferred accumulated data, said reader being provided on
5 the machine and being adapted to provide a display of the accumulated data.

9. A credit-operated machine according to any one of claims 1 to 7 further including a reader for reading transferred accumulated data, said reader being provided
10 separately from the machine.

10. A credit-operated machine according to claim 1 substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to and as illustrated in the accompanying drawings.

11. A credit-operated machine according to any one of
15 claims 1 to 9 in combination with a said data-recording device which is coded so that it can only be used with the particular said machine which is pre-set to be compatible with the said coded device.

12. A plurality of credit-operated machines according to
20 any one of claims 1 to 10 in combination with a said data-recording device which is coded so that it can only be used with said particular plurality of machines which are all pre-set to be compatible with the said coded device.

13. The combination of claim 12 wherein the particular
25 plurality of machines are all located at the same site.

14. The combination of claim 12 wherein the particular

plurality of machines are all located at a particular group of sites.

15. The combination of claim 12 wherein the particular plurality of machines are all of the same particular kind.

Patents Act 1977 Examiner's report to the Comptroller under Section 17 The Search report)	Application number GB 9320479.0
Relevant Technical Fields (i) UK Cl (Ed.M) G4V (VBF) (ii) Int Cl (Ed.5) G07F 5/20, 5/22, 9/00, 9/08, 17/32, 17/34, 17/36, 17/38 Databases (see below) (i) UK Patent Office collections of GB, EP, WO and US patent specifications. (ii) ONLINE DATABASE : WPI	Search Examiner G NICHOLLS Date of completion of Search 21 OCTOBER 1994 Documents considered relevant following a search in respect of Claims :- 1-15

Categories of documents

X: Document indicating lack of novelty or of inventive step.	P: Document published on or after the declared priority date but before the filing date of the present application.
Y: Document indicating lack of inventive step if combined with one or more other documents of the same category.	E: Patent document published on or after, but with priority date earlier than, the filing date of the present application.
A: Document indicating technological background and/or state of the art.	&: Member of the same patent family; corresponding document.

Category	Identity of document and relevant passages	Relevant to claim(s)
X	EP 0360613 A2 (BALLY) - whole document particularly column 8 lines 18-38	1-4, 7, 9, 11

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